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A

SERMON

PREACHED at an

ORDINATION

O F

DEACONS.

MARCH 5, 1735.

Published at the REQUEST of some
who heard it.

By JOHN BRINE.

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ST. MARK'S

PREACHED BY

ORDINATION



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JOHN B. B. B.

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I TIM. iii. 8, 9.

*Likewise must the Deacons be grave,
not double tongued, not given to much
Wine, not greedy of filthy Lucre;
holding the Mystery of Faith in a
pure Conscience.*

LHUMBLY beg Leave of you,
my Brethren, who have been
at this Time solemnly called
to, and invested with the Of-
fice of Deacons, to lay be-
fore you the Qualifications which are ne-
cessary for Persons in that Capacity, the
Work that is proper to it, and to offer
some Things by way of Encouragement
to you therein from these Words.

THE Apostle begins this Chapter with
observing the Excellency of the Office of
a Bishop, Pastor, or Overseer in a Church
of Christ; and then gives the necessary

4 *A Sermon preached at*

Characters of such who are in that Function.

AFTER this he proceeds to mention the several Virtues requisite to Persons who serve the Church in the Station of Deacons, most of which are collected in the Words now to be considered.

THE Method I shall pursue, in my Discourse on this Subject, will be this :

First, I SHALL observe the Notation of the Term *Deacon*, with the various Application of it.

Secondly, SHEW what gave Rise to this Office in the Church.

Thirdly, THE Qualifications of these Officers.

Fourthly, THEIR proper Work.

Fifthly, Offer some Things for your Encouragement therein.

First, I BEGIN with the Notation of the Word, and the different Application of it: *Διάκονος*, *Deacons*, signifies, a Minister; from the Verb *διακονέω*, to minister speedily. Which imports, that Persons in this Office should closely, and eagerly pursue the Duties of it; that they ought to minister to others, as with Chearfulness, so with Expedition.

It is a Title of Office, Service, or Administration, and is variously applied. 'Tis given

given to Christ ; Now I say, that Jesus Christ was a Minister, Διάκονον, of the Circumcision for the Truth of God, to confirm the Promises made unto the Fathers^a. He came not to be ministred unto, but to minister. The Apostle gives this Name to Magistrates ; for Rulers are not a Terror to good Works, but to the evil : Wilt thou then not be afraid of the Power ? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have Praise of the same ; for he is the Minister, Διάκονος, of God to thee for good^b. It is applied to Preachers of the Gospel ; Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but Ministers, Διάκονοι, by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every Man^c ? Every true Disciple and Worshipper of Christ hath this Title given to him ; If any Man serve me let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my Servant, Διάκονος, be : If any Man serve me, him will my Father honour^d.

THE Apostle bestows this Character on Phebe ; I commend unto you Phebe our Sister, which is a Servant, Διάκονον, a Deaconess, of the Church which is at Cenchrea^e. I am of Opinion, that there were Deaconesses in the primitive Churches, whose Business it was to visit the poor, af-

^a Rom. xv. 8.

^b Chap. xiii. 4.

^c 1 Cor. iii. 5.

^d John xii. 26.

^e Rom. xvi. 1.

flicted, and aged Sisters, and to administer Relief to them ; to acquaint the Church with their Necessities, and obtain Help for them. Persons chose to this Work were generally Widows, such who had been married, and behaved in that Station of Life with Chastity, Diligence, and Prudence, who are called *Widows indeed*^f. It was required that they should be Sixty Years of Age when appointed by the Church to attend on this Service ; *let not a Widow be taken into the Number, under Threescore Years old, having been the Wife of one Man*^g. The excellent and learned ecclesiastical Historian Mr. *Bingham* speaking of them hath these Words : “ There is some mention made
 “ of them in Scripture, by which it appears,
 “ that their Office was as antient as the apostolical Age ; St. *Paul* calls *Phebe*, a
 “ *Servant of the Church at Cenchrea*,
 “ *Rom. xvi. 1.* the original Word is Διά-
 “ κολου, answerable to the *Latin* Word
 “ *Ministra* ; which is the Name given
 “ them in *Pliny’s Epistle*, which speaks about the Christians. *Tertullian* and
 “ some others, call them *Viduae*, *Widows* ; and their Office, *Viduatus* ; be-
 “ cause they were commonly chosen out

^f 1 Tim. v. 3.

^g Ver. 9.

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“ of the Widows of the Church. For
“ the same Reason *Epiphanius*, and the
“ Council of *Laodicea*, call them Πρεσβυ-
“ τιδες, *elderly Widows*; because none but
“ such were ordinarily taken into this Of-
“ fice ^h.” Not but that Virgins were
sometimes admitted to this Service, as he
afterwards observes.

And Dr. *Cave* allows the same, whose
Account of them is this: “ Their Orig-
“ inal was very early, and of equal stand-
“ ing with the Infancy of the Church;
“ such was *Phebe* in the Church at *Cen-*
“ *chrea*, mentioned by St. *Paul*; such
“ were those two Servant-Maids spoken
“ of by *Pliny* in his Letters to the Em-
“ peror, whom he examined upon the
“ Rack ⁱ; such was the famous *Olympias*
“ in the Church of *Constantinople*, not to
“ mention any more particular Instances.
“ They were either Widows, and then
“ not to be taken into the Service of the
“ Church, under Threescore Years of Age,
“ according to St. *Paul*’s Direction, or
“ else Virgins, who having been educated
“ in order to it, and given Testimony of a
“ chaste and sober Conversation, were set

^h Origen. Ecclesiast. lib. 2. cap. 22. p. 304.

ⁱ Quo magis necessarium credidi ex duabus Ancillis quae
Ministreae dicebantur, quid esset veri & per tormenta
quaerere. *Plini* lib. 10. Ep. 97.

“ apart

“ apart at Forty. What the proper Place
 “ and Ministry of these Deaconesses was in
 “ the antient Church, though *Matthew*
 “ *Blasteres* seems to render a little doubt-
 “ ful, yet certainly it principally consisted
 “ in such Offices as these ; to attend upon
 “ the Women at times of publick Worship, e-
 “ specially in the Administration of Baptism,
 “ that when they were to be divested, in or-
 “ der to their *Immersion*, they might over-
 “ shadow them, so as nothing of Indecency
 “ and Uncomeliness might appear ; some-
 “ times they were employ’d in instructing the
 “ more rude and ignorant sort of Women
 “ in the plain and easy Principles of Chri-
 “ stianity, and in preparing them for Bap-
 “ tism ; otherwhiles in visiting and at-
 “ tending upon Women that were sick,
 “ in conveying Messages, Counsels, Con-
 “ sultations, Relief (especially in Times
 “ of Persecution, when it was dangerous
 “ for the Officers of the Church) to the
 “ Martyrs, and them that were in Prison.
 “ And these Women, no doubt it was, that
 “ *Libanius* speaks of among the Christians,
 “ who were so very ready to be employed
 “ in these Offices of Humanity^k.”

To these Observations the Words of *Cle-
mens Alexandrinus* agree ; We also know

^k *Primitive Christianity*, Part I. chap. viii. p. 157.

*what Things Paul requires of Deaconesses in the first Epistle to Timothy*¹. It has been thought proper by some Congregations of late Years, to appoint faithful Women to such Service among them, as the Primitive Churches did; nor can I apprehend that any thing is justly to be excepted against that Practice, since it appears to be apostolical.

THIS Name is especially given to the Stewards of the Church-Treasure, and those who take care of the Poor; which is one considerable Branch of their Work.

Secondly, THAT which gave Rise to these Officers in the Church, was, the great Increase of the Disciples through the Apostles preaching. When the Number of Believers was small, the Apostles performed those good Offices which Persons in this Station are called to; but, upon a large Addition of Members to the Church, they were not able to attend on their Ministry, and continue to take care of the poor Saints. Now as they were peculiarly called to preach the Gospel, they judged it improper to engage in other Services, which would unavoidably interrupt

¹ Ἰσμεν γὰρ καὶ ὅσα περὶ διακόνων γυναικῶν ἐν τῇ ἐτέρᾳ πρὸς Τιμόθεον ἐπιστολῇ ὁ γυναιὶ διατάσσεται Παυλῷ.
Sicrom. lib. 3. p. 327.

them in that their ſpecial Buſineſs. And therefore they propoſed to the Church, to chooſe Perſons who might be thought ſuitable for that Truſt.

AN Account of which we have in theſe Words: *And in thoſe Days, when the Number of the Diſciples was multiplied, there aroſe a Murmuring of the Grecians againſt the Hebrews, becauſe their Widows were neglected in the daily Miniſtration. Then the Twelve called the Multitude of the Diſciples unto them, and ſaid, It is not Reaſon that we ſhould leave the Word of God and ſerve Tables. Wherefore, Brethren, look ye out among your ſelves Men of honeſt Report, full of the Holy Ghoſt and Wiſdom, whom we may appoint over this Buſineſs. But we will give our ſelves continually to Prayer, and to the Miniſtry of the Word^m.*

Thirdly,

^m *Acts vi. 1, 2, 3, 4.* From this Inſtance it evidently appears, that the Right of Chooſing Officers in the Church is lodged in the Members. The Apoſtles were very far from aſſuming ſuch a Power over the Church, as ſome have uſurped ſince, who could never pretend to their extraordinary Call or Furniture from Chriſt. They acted upon this juſt Principle, That all Societies have an undoubted Right to fix upon the Perſons who ſhall ſerve them in any Office or Capacity. The Election of theſe Officers was wholly referred to the Community; indeed the Apoſtles hinted what Qualifications were neceſſary to Men employed in this Service, but left the Members to determine
among

Thirdly, THE Qualifications necessary to this Office are many and great.

I. Gravity is required in such as serve the Church in this Capacity; *likewise must the Deacons be grave.* The original Word is *σεμνός*, which is sometimes translated, *honest*; as for Instance, *finally, Brethren, whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, σεμνά, Phil. iv. 8.* It is highly proper that Persons in this Office should be of *honest Report*, or Men of known Probity and strict Honour, because they are entrusted with the Church's Treasure, which ought to be faithfully expended in promoting those pious Views, for which it is contributed; no Part of it may lawfully be disposed of to serve other Purposes upon any Pretence whatever. And therefore, in the Choice of Men to this Trust, regard is to be had to their Integrity and inviolable Justice.

Farther, the Word is used for Sobriety and Chastity; *even so must their Wives be grave, σεμνὰς* ⁿ; that is to say, sober, modest, and chaste. This is a very necessary

among themselves, in whom the excellent Virtues mentioned were found. And therefore they considered the Multitude as capable of judging, without their uncommon Abilities, what Persons were fit to be called to Office among them.

ⁿ 1 Tim. 3. 11.

Part of a Deacon's Character. Levity and Frothiness in Conversation is unbecoming all Professors of Religion, but especially such as are invested with Office-Power in a Church of Christ.

II. FREEDOM from Guile and Hypocrisy, which is intended by these Words, *not double tongued*, διλόγες; the Word signifies one who, out of the same Mouth, breathes heat and cold °, that is, contrary things. The Apostle hereby condemns feigned Expressions of Respect; the Heart and the Tongue ought to perfectly agree in our Profession of Friendship to others; we are commanded to love in Reality, *love not in Word and in Tongue, but in Deed and in Truth*. This apostolical Exhortation is too little regarded by many, who are at sometimes very liberal in their Declarations of Value and Esteem, for such with whom they maintain a Correspondence; and yet, by Methods as ungenerous, as they are sly and designing, detract from their real Worth, and sink their deserved Reputation among Men; which Practice is a Shame to the Christian Religion. Those who are in the Office of Deacons, ought to be free from this abominable Vice: It

° Qui ex uno ore calidum & frigidum spirat. *Vid. Leigh's Crit. Sac.*

becomes

becomes them, to shew all Tokens of Tenderneſs and Compaſſion to the Diſtreſſed, and to be as diligent in their Endeavours to relieve them, as they are forward to declare their Sympathy with them under their Troubles; in Imitation of their great Lord and Maſter, in whom there was *no Guile*. Is it not an intolerable Impoſition upon the Afflicted and Low, to raiſe their Expectations of Aſſiſtance, by fair Speeches, and, notwithstanding, heighten their Diſtreſs by a wilful Neglect of their Caſe?

III. TEMPERANCE is required in the Character of a Deacon; *not given to much Wine*. The moderate Uſe of any of the good Creatures of God, is allowable; Wine is as lawful to be drank as Water, provided it be not to exceſs. So much is implied in the Words of the Apoſtle; he doth not forbid drinking of Wine, but only a greedy and exceſſive Uſe of it: He adviſes *Timothy* to it, *drink no longer Water but a little Wine, for thy Stomach's ſake, and thine often Infirmities* ^P. Our Lord, who was a perfect Pattern in all Virtues, did not deny himſelf the Uſe of this, as may be collected from what the *Phariſees* maliciously objected to him; *the Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and*

^P 1 Tim. 5. 23.

ye say, *Behold a gluttonous Man, and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners* ⁹. Immoderate and excessive drinking is absolutely unlawful, it is a *leading Vice*, and generally draws after it many great Evils; besides that, it is a shameful Abuse of the Bounty of Providence, and of the Person himself who is guilty thereof; and therefore all Professors of Religion ought to carefully avoid it, but particularly such as are invested with any Office in the Church of Christ.

IV. PERSONS in this Capacity should be clear of Avarice, *not covetous*.

THE same Qualification is necessary to a Bishop: The Apostle gives it as a Part of his Character, *μὴ ἀχρεοῦς* ^r, the same Word as is here used, *not greedy of filthy Lucre*. It is very requisite that Persons in this Function should not be of an avaritious Disposition; because that might prove a strong Temptation to them to desert their Service in the Church, it being seldom in their Power to provide for themselves and Families in such a manner as Men of Trade and secular Business are able to do; and they perhaps, not less capable of it, if they thought proper to devote themselves to it. A free and generous Temper is required in a Deacon, no less than in an

⁹ Lukevii. 34.

^r 1 Tim. v. 3.

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Elder, for which there are special Reasons: These Officers are to receive the Collections of the Church, and dispose of them to those Ends for which they are made; therefore it is proper that they should excite the Members to true Generosity, by a liberal Contribution according to their Ability; for it is well known, that *Example* has a far greater Influence upon Men than *Precept*: Besides this, if they are backward in communicating of their Substance to pious Uses, it must be a Check upon them when called to stir up others to Works of Charity and Beneficence; and an exorbitant love of Money, may tempt them to act an unfaithful Part, in their Distributions of the Church's Treasure. From whence it is easy to collect, that covetous Persons are wholly unfit for this Office; and, that a Community is guilty of the greatest Imprudence in the Choice of those who be so.

V. THEY ought to be such Persons as govern their Families well; *let the Deacons be the Husbands of one Wife, ruling their Children and their own Houses well*^r. In order to which, it is needful that they behave with Prudence, Sobriety and Caution, to be exem-

^r 1 Tim. iii. 12.

plary in real Virtue and Religion. It is the Duty of all Parents and Masters of Families, to instruct their Children and Servants in what manner to demean themselves, to sharply reprove them for Sin, and to cherish all Appearance of Concern about the eternal Welfare of their Souls; as a Connivance at an Evil in those under our Care and Government, necessarily involves us in Guilt, it will certainly occasion the Enemies of the Gospel to reflect on our holy Profession. It is more especially the Duty of Officers in the Church of Christ, to discountenance all unlawful Actions, and to encourage undissembled Piety in those about them; the Man who neglects to maintain a due Decorum in his own, is a very improper Person to be entrusted with any Authority in God's House; for it is hardly to be supposed, that he who is negligent in exercising his Power over those that are under his immediate and constant Inspection, will be diligent and faithful in his Watch over such as are not so near to him. And therefore it must be allowed, that it is requisite Deacons should govern their Domesticks well, and wisely.

VI. IT is necessary that these Officers should be Men of sound Principles, *holding the Mystery of Faith in a pure Conscience.* Here I shall inquire,

I. What

1. WHAT is intended by Faith ?
2. WHAT a Mystery is ?
3. OBSERVE that there are mysterious Doctrines in divine Revelation.
4. THAT these are to be embraced, and stedfastly held by the Deacons of the Church.

5. IN a pure Conscience.

I. FAITH is taken in different Senses.

1.) IT is to be understood of a new and spiritual Principle wrought in the Saints by divine Power, which believes in and accepts of Christ as the alone Saviour of Sinners: Thus, in these Words; *by Grace are ye saved through Faith, and that not of your selves, it is the Gift of God^t*. The Nature and Actings of this Grace, cannot be spiritually discerned by any but those who are the Subjects of it: All unregenerate Persons are unacquainted with this Grace, for it far exceeds the Reach of the unsanctified Understanding. It is held in a pure Conscience. The Exercise of this gracious Principle purges our Consciences, which are naturally defiled; *and put no Difference between us and them, purifying their Hearts by Faith^u*.

2.) THE Gospel is sometimes designed by it: As for Instance, *Do we make void the Law through Faith*, i. e. the Gospel,

^t Eph. ii. 8.

^u Acts xv. 9.

God forbid ; yea, we establish the Law ^w. This is the Sense in which we are to take it here.

2. A MYSTERY is something that is incomprehensible and inexplicable: Some affix no other Idea to an evangelical Mystery than, that it is a Matter which has been secret and hid, and suppose, that upon a Discovery of it, we may be able to fully understand and account for it, they will not allow that its Nature is incomprehensible, but think, that it immediately ceases to be a Mystery, when once it is revealed. This is done with a manifest Design to subvert all such Notions or Principles contained in Revelation, which are not to be comprehended by Reason: But this is much too low a Sense of the Word, as it is applied to the Gospel in the inspired Writings. There are many Things of whose Existence in Nature we cannot possibly doubt, which are yet unaccountable, mysterious, and inexplicable ; for the proof of which, we need not look any farther than our selves ; the Constitution and Frame of human Nature is really so.

LET such as object to any Doctrine (which is supposed to be a Branch of revealed Truth) because it is mysterious, and not capable of Demonstration by Reason,

^w Rom. iii. 31.

first acquaint us, how the Soul, which is Immaterial, is united to the Body, in Man? What are the *Bands* and *Ligaments* of that Union, which it is certain there is between these two Parts so very different in their Nature? How the Soul actuates and moves every Member of the Body at pleasure? How it is that the Mind becomes affected with the Indisposition of the Body, and that with the Disorder of the Soul? Which are Things as indisputable as they are inexplicable. I say, let those Persons, before they reject Mysteries in Revelation, clearly explain these things to us. If they decline this as a Task to which they are unequal; must they not grant that their own Make is a standing Evidence against their Incredulity in divine Things? which is cherished by this *vain Pretence*, that nothing is to be credited that is *incomprehensible*.

3. THE Gospel is a Mystery, or Chain of Truths which far transcend our Reason. We are so far from denying this, that it is our avowed Principle. In this Light it is constantly represented by the Apostle: Thus he speaks of it; *even the Mystery which hath been hid from Ages and Generations, but now is made manifest to his Saints, to whom God would make known what are the Riches of the Glory of this*
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My-

Mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the Hope of Glory ^x: And elsewhere; but we speak the Wisdom of God in a Mystery, even the hidden Wisdom which God ordained before the World, to our Glory ^y. The Revelation of the Scheme of Salvation by a crucified Jesus, is in it self a Mystery; it doth not bear this Name merely because it was eternally hid in the divine Mind where it was formed: If all sacred Truths were reducible to the Reason of Man, it might be justly expected that Persons of superior Understandings would most readily embrace them, and give the best Account of them; whereas the contrary of that is true. Hence are those Words of the Apostle; *but the natural Man* ψυχικὸς ἀνθρώπος, *the Man of Soul* ^z, i. e. a Person furnished with the utmost strength of Reason, *receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God; they are Foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. Which, in my Opinion, is a sufficient Proof, that the Things of God are far above the Reach of the most improved Understanding, and greatest Genius; and discovers the great *Vanity* of those who plead the Sentiments of *polite* Persons, in their Favour Doctrines of the greatest importance are

^x Col. i, 26, 27.^y 1 Cor. ii. 7.^z 1 Cor. 2. 14.
very

very mysterious and incomprehensible ; among which are these :

(1.) THE Doctrine of the Trinity, or the proper Deity and distinct Personality of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Concerning the Divinity and Personality of the Father, there is no dispute ; and I apprehend, that if the scriptural Account of the Deity of the Son were diligently, and with due Humility attended to, no Objections would ever be advanced against it ; because it is as expressly asserted in the sacred Oracles as any Truth therein contained ; *In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*^a. The Works performed by Christ, the Perfections which reside in him, and the religious Worship which is given to him distinctly from the Father, clearly evince his proper Deity. And since the same Attributes are said to be in the Holy Spirit, as are in the Father and Son, and the same humble Worship is to be paid to him, as distinct from them both, we have no just Reason to doubt of his real Divinity and distinct Personality. This Doctrine is a great Mystery ; but because we cannot explain how it is consistent with the Unity of the divine Essence, will it be safe or prudent for us to refuse Credit to the clearest

^a John i. 1.

Evidence for it in the Word of God? Surely, No.

(2.) THE Union of the divine and human Nature in the Person of the Mediator, is a glorious Truth, and as great a Mystery; *the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us; we beheld his Glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth*^b. The Man Christ Jesus subsists in God, and God resides in him, in a manner not to be explained or conceived of by us; *in him dwelleth all the Fulness of the Godhead bodily*^c. The Apostle pronounces this a great Mystery; *great is the Mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the Flesh*. Let it be observed, that the Thing it self is so; which is more than some seem willing to allow, who suppose that a Mystery in Scripture, only intends something which has lain hid and secret, and that there is nothing mysterious or inexplicable in its Nature. As for those who grant that the Union of Christ with God, is ineffable and inconceivable, they have the less reason to object to the Doctrine of the Trinity; because that cannot be accounted for and explained by us. Upon the same Reasoning they may as well deny the Union of Christ with God, as his proper Deity, and distinct Personality from

^b John i. 14.

^c Col. ii. 9.

the Father ; which they would do well to consider.

(3.) THE whole of Salvation by Christ crucified, is a Mystery. The Imputation of our Sins to him, the Infliction of the Punishment due to us upon him, and our Discharge from Guilt on account thereof, the Justification of our Persons by his Obedience, are precious Truths, but very wonderful and mysterious ; natural Men, tho' ever so much improved in Knowledge, esteem them irrational and unintelligible Notions. Thus the Apostle acquaints us, that the Cross of Christ, or the Doctrine of Redemption by his Blood, was treated with Contempt by the wise and learned ; *we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness*^d. Reason concludes, that a Charge of Guilt to an innocent Person, and punishing of him as if he was the real Offender, is an unaccountable Method by which the Criminal is to be discharged, and wholly freed from an Imputation of Offence. Nor doth it determine more in Favour of accounting the Righteousness of one perfectly holy, to sinful Men, and acting towards them as righteous therein. These are Mysteries not to be understood without divine Illumi-

^d 1 Cor. i. 23.

nation ; the Knowledge of them is a free Gift, and he is a happy Person who is enabled to spiritually discern and embrace them. In these Doctrines he clearly sees divine Wisdom and Goodness are most eminently display'd ; to him Christ as crucified is the *Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.*

(4.) THE Doctrine of the Resurrection is a great Mystery. The Body of Man is composed of Dust, to that it returns at Death, and is changed into numerous Forms ; how far those Particles of Matter which once made up the Body of a Man may be separated, or with what a Multitude of other Bodies they may be mixed, none can tell. And therefore if Reason is consulted in this Article of Faith, 'tis no wonder if it be thought an incredible thing. It is only a strict regard to the infinite Knowledge and Power of God, that will bring Men over to the Belief of it, the Difficulties which attend it to human View, are so many and great. And yet this is a fundamental Doctrine, and necessary to be believed, as is most clearly asserted by the Apostle ; *if there be no Resurrection of the Dead, then Christ is not risen, and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your Faith also is vain.*

(5.) THE Change which will pass upon the Saints who shall remain, and be alive at the second Coming of Christ, is a Mystery; *Behold, I shew you a Mystery, we shall not all sleep, i. e. die; but we shall be changed in a Moment, in the twinkling of an Eye, at the last Trump (for the Trumpet shall sound) and the Dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*^f. I apprehend the Secrecy of this Matter, before this Revelation of it, is not the only Reason why the Apostle calls it a Mystery; for if so, it must be concluded, that there is nothing wonderful and mysterious in the Thing it self, which no Person, as I conceive, can imagine; for if our present Frame be considered as mortal, and naturally tending to Corruption and Death, we shall see evident Cause to allow it is exceeding wonderful that all shall not die: As it is impossible Corruption should inherit Incorruption, it is absolutely necessary that our corrupt Bodies should be freed from those Qualities which now attend them. But then, how can we apprehend this will be done without our dying, and being reduced to Dust as others are, especially that this surprising Change should be wrought in a

^f 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

Manner so sudden as the Apostle declares it will be. Certainly there is not any, taking the Thing in this View, but will readily grant it to be a great Mystery.

4. IT is necessary that Deacons should embrace, and stedfastly hold these heavenly Truths. Every Officer in a Christian Community, we may reasonably suppose, has some particular Interest in, and Influence upon the Members; and therefore may, with the more ease, bring them over to his Opinion; consequently it is very proper that his Sentiments should be just, and, in all things of *importance*, agreeable to divine Revelation; if not, what less than the Spread of Error can be expected from him? Hence there is special Reason why these Officers should hold the *Mystery of Faith*. All the Saints are called upon to *contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered* to them; such as are chosen to Office, are more especially under Obligation to propagate and defend evangelical Doctrines, *the Form of sound Words* ought to be held fast by them, and not departed from upon any Score whatever.

5. THEY ought to hold the *Mystery of Faith in a pure Conscience*, the Word is *συγείνησις*, which is sometimes put for the whole Heart, Soul and Spirit, working inwardly upon it self by way of Reflection;
and

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and herein do I exercise myself to have always a Conscience void of Offence toward God, and toward Men^s ; that is to say, a Heart clear from Guilt upon a most serious Reflection on my Conduct. The Heart of every Man is naturally polluted, and the Conscience is defiled by Sin contracted, and cannot be pure but as sanctified by the Grace of God, and cleansed by the Blood of Christ ; therefore these Doctrines are to be embraced and held with the Heart, as made holy by the Operations of God's Spirit upon it. The Head is not the Seat of evangelical Truths when they are received in a spiritual Manner, but the Soul, the Heart, and Mind. Persons who have thus believed them, will never be prevailed upon to part with them; either thro' the Flattery of pretended Friends, or the ill Treatment of avowed Enemies.

Fourthly, THE Business of Deacons is to serve Tables^h ; that is to say, those which are to be furnished by the Church.

First, THE Table of the Lord, Christ hath instituted a solemn Ordinance, by which his People commemorate his Sufferings and Death ; of which Institution the Apostle gives this Account, for I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered un-

^s Acts xxiv. 16.

^h Chap. vi. 2, 3.

to you, that the Lord Jesus, the same Night in which he was betrayed, took Bread: And when he had given Thanks he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my Body, which is broken for you; this do in Remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the Cup, when he had supped, saying, This Cup is the new Testament in my Blood; this do ye in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death till he come¹. The great Care, Wisdom, and Love of Christ, appear in this Appointment; his evident Design therein, is the Consolation of the Saints; it is, that their Faith may be strengthened in his Favour to them; and that they may increase in an Abhorrence of Sin, which was the Cause of his Passion and Death. The Deacons are to provide every thing necessary for the Celebration of this Institution, but not at their own private Expence, for that is the common Concern of the Community; therefore nothing more is to be expected from them in this Particular, than to furnish the Table, and acquaint the Church with the Charge, and bear their Part in defraying of it. These Officers are also to communicate the Bread and Wine

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24, 25, 26.

to the several Members of the Society.

Secondly, IT is a Branch of their Work to relieve the Poor out of the Church's Stock raised for that Purpose. The Saints are commanded to shew Tenderneſs and Compassion to the Afflicted and Low, it is the Will of God that they should assist the Neceſſitous, that is an acceptable Service to him; *to do good and communicate forget not, for with ſuch Sacrifices God is well pleaſed*^k. This is a Duty not only incumbent on thoſe who abound in Riches, tho' a *larger* Contribution is juſtly to be expected from them; be-
cause much is required of ſuch *to whom much is given*: But Perſons of a lower Rank are under Obligation to perform Acts of Charity, even thoſe who live by the *Labour* of their *Hands*; *let him that ſtole ſteal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his Hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth*^l. A warm Affection to Chriſt, ſincere Love to the Saints as *his Members*, and a true Senſe of divine Bounty towards us, will certainly prevail with us to chearfully, and without grudging, praſtiſe this Beneficence. It is the Deacon's Buſineſs to receive the

^k Heb. xiii. 16.

^l Eph. iv. 20.

Collections made by the Church, and assist such therewith whose Circumstances call for help; and therefore, that the Community may be put to no unnecessary Charge, it is proper that these Officers should visit the Members who apply for Assistance, and examine whether it is needful, or if their Poverty arises from Profuseness and Indolence, which, if they find upon Examination, they must reprove these Persons and exhort them to Frugality and Diligence, that the Church may not be burdened with the Cases of such: Besides, visiting the poor Members is necessary on another Account; *viz.* that none may suffer by their too great Modesty, which will not allow them to ask for that Assistance which they really want; some such Persons there are, tho' perhaps their Number is not equal to that of those who are guilty of the other Extream: Again; it may encourage the Indigent and Afflicted, to be visited by their Brethren. If any shall think, that Deacons are not obliged to this by Virtue of their Office, I apprehend they are greatly mistaken. Whatever is given to the Poor, it ought to be with Pity, and sweetness of Disposition; not with sharp and unkind Words, because the Grief occasioned by rough Language, may far exceed the Service done them by what is

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communicated to them ; and then also let it be considered, that the Lord *loveth a chearful Giver.*

Thirldy, Another Part of their Business, is to take care of the Minister's Table. It is very evident, that a Minister of the Gospel ought to be provided for by those who enjoy the Benefit of his Ministrations ; *let him that is taught in the Word communicate to him that teacheth in all good Things*^m. The temporal Assistance which a diligent Preacher of the divine Word receives from those who attend upon his Ministry, is not to be compared with the Advantage of his Instructions, as is observed by the Apostle, treating on this Argument ; *if we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things*ⁿ. It belongs to the Deacons to consider, whether the Elder of the Church is agreeably furnished with the Accommodations of Life, and if he is not, to recommend the Consideration of his strait Circumstances to the Members, in order to obtain a more liberal Contribution from them, that he may not be pressed with Difficulties ; which, in no *small Degree* will *incommode* him for the *Discharge* of his *important Service*. And if there be any of the Society that either wholly

^m Gal. vi. 6.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ix. 11,

neglect to bear a Part in the Minister's Support, or do not contribute to it according to their Ability, they ought to reprove such, and exhort them to a faithful Performance of their Duty in this so just and reasonable a Thing.

It must be confessed, that some considerable *Difficulties* will attend a *strict* and *religious Regard* to the Duties proper to this Office, and therefore that you, my Brethren, who have been now invested therewith, may not conclude that you have undertook a Trust to which you shall prove unequal. I proceed,

Fifthly, To offer a few Things for your Encouragement in this Undertaking.

I. THE Service to which you are called is Christ's, his Interest, and the Good of his People are concerned in this Matter. That being duly considered, will be sufficient of itself to inspire you with Courage, and raise you above all the Troubles which you are apprehensive will necessarily attend the Execution of your Office. We are all under infinite Obligations to him; how great were the Sufferings to which he freely submitted upon our Account! What a Variety of precious Benefits do we receive from him! our Deliverance
from

from eternal Ruin cost him his Life. A vast Treasure of Grace he expends upon his People to meeten them for Heaven, and will eternally communicate to them, to compleat their Happiness there. Therefore what Work (wherein his Honour is interested) shall we esteem too arduous for us to undertake, or what Difficulties too great to encounter with? so we may but be instrumental in advancing the Cause of one to whom we are thus highly obliged. If these Things have their proper weight upon our Minds, we shall think *his Yoke is easy and his Burden is light* °.

2. HE that has called you will certainly assist you in his Service, and therefore you have no reason to be discouraged: Christ, the Head of the Church, has a fulness of Grace in his Hands; which is abundantly more than equal to the Wants of his Servants and Members. Whatever Exercises he brings upon his People, he is able and determined to afford them suitable Support; *as their Days are, their Strength shall be* ^p. And whenever he directs any in his Providence to engage in his sacred Work, he furnishes them for it.

I AM apprehensive, my Brethren, that your Minds may be struck with some Concern, by hearing the Qualifications that are

° Matt. xi. 30.

^p Deut. xxxiii. 25.

necessary for Persons who undertake this Office and the Duties proper to it, as being conscious of your own Inability. But consider that your Lord is able to communicate every needful Virtue, and to carry you through those Difficulties which appear to you insuperable; *his Grace is sufficient for you, and his Strength will be made perfect in Weakness*⁹. It is with me unquestionable, that your Eyes are directed to him from whom all your Strength is derived. And may you of *his Fulness receive, and Grace for Grace*^r.

3. THE Office is difficult, but the Honour arising from the proper Discharge of it is great. I am very far from thinking that it is prudent or safe for us, to embark in the Cause of Religion with a *View* to acquire *Applause* from Men, or to raise our *Reputation* in the *World*; that is an evident Sign of a base and low Disposition of Mind. But then, it is lawful to animate and raise our Spirits under a Prospect of the Troubles to which we expose ourselves, in an Adherence to the Interest of Christ, by considering, that it is an unspeakable Honour put upon us, to be called to the meanest Post in his House: Thus the Psalmist did, as appears by his own Words; *For a Day in thy Courts is better than a*

⁹ 1 Cor. xii. 9.

^r John i. 16.

*Thousand: I had rather be a Door-keeper
in the House of my God, than to dwell in
the Tents of Wickedness^r.*

I UNFEIGNEDLY wish, that you may be
enabled to use the Office of Deacons well,
and so purchase to your selves a good De-
gree, and great Boldness in the Faith
which is in Christ Jesus^r.

^r Psal. lxxxiv. 10. ^r 1 Tim. iii. 13.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

PAge 4. Line 22. read *Deacon*. p. 5. l. 20. r. Διάκονοι. ^r.
p. 7. in the Margin, l. 1. r. *Origin*. p. 14. l. 14. r.
not greedy of filthy Lucre. l. 17. r. μὴ ἀσχοκῆσθαι.

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